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## ABSTRACT

The main factors that determine what will be taught in the public schools are discussed. The impact upon school curriculum by the following six major forces are examined: (1) the policy and economy of the government and the community; (2) the values and attitudes of the family and the community; (3) the perceived wants and needs of pupils and parents; (4) input by conventionally recognized sources of advisement; (5) educational research and scholarship; and (6) the professional interest of teachers and administrators. (JD)

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# WHAT "DRIVES" THE SCHOOLS?

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# ABSTRACT

This paper lists, briefly describes and comments on what I take to be the main factors which determine what schools do. A list of the factors will be seen on the following page.

This document is a brief summary of research and scholarship conducted by sociologists, ethnographers, psychologists, political scientists and others over the past decade or so. I first report only results. Citations and references are omitted. Certain comments are appended (pps. 4-6).

By "schools", we mean teaching institutions, but especially the public schools, and, within the public schools, especially K-14. Since we mean teaching institutions, the schools' drive is along the curricular road--what is taught, whether consciously or unconsciously, successfully or unsuccessfully.

Six "forces" determine the overwhelming bulk of the curriculum. They are named below. A brief account of each follows.

1. Civitas (needs of the polity and the economy)
2. The common culture and its subcultures
3. Client-perceived wants and needs
4. Knowledge resources (conventionally recognized "fields" of knowledge and more-or-less organized bodies of experience and behavior).
5. Communities of inquiry (research and scholarship)
6. "Professional" interests (of teachers, administrators, etc.; (both self-interests and in others' welfare).

#### CIVITAS

"A popular government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a farce or a

tragedy, or perhaps both." So James Madison summarizes one relation of education and the state.

"As the State derives strength from the unity and solidarity of its citizens without distinction as to class, so the school derives strength from the unity and solidarity of all classes beneath its roof....A degraded or neglected class, if left to themselves, will become more degraded and neglected." So Charles Sumner (1875) on another role of the school re the nation.

"--mere intellectual light, without moral warmth, will not produce a healthy social life--." So Richard Grant White, 1880.

"This Court, taking into consideration the great neglect in many parents and masters in training up their children in learning and labor, and other employments which may be profitable to the commonwealth, do hereupon order and decree--". So the Records of the Governor and Company of Massachusetts Bay (Boston, 1853).

The four subclasses of civil interest represented here continue to affect what is taught in schools: information pertinent to circumstantial problems of national scope; a "community" amid diversities of class and station sufficient to enable communication and collaboration; a body of common manners and morals sufficient to grease the social wheels; saleable skills.

The channels of input to the schools are numerous. Many are governmental, per se. There are government agencies, such

as the National Institute of Education and the Office of Education. There are governing and executive individuals and bodies: The President, State legislative committees, State and sub-state Superintendancies and Commissioners. There are governmental agencies of narrower scope, those concerned with energy or coastal regions, for example. Manpower agencies and other sources of information and propaganda concern themselves with employment opportunities and needs emanating from industry groups, unions and professional societies. The media initiate some movements and communicate others originating from the citizenry generally or special interests among them (e.g. sex stereotypes, "crime on the streets", absenteeism, sabotage, mass transportation).

#### COMMON CULTURE AND SUBCULTURES

"Common", here, means neither contemptible nor universal. We have too much of pluralism to claim a universal American culture. The culture which is widely shared--widely respected institutions; prevailing, if not universal, morals and manners; prevailing beliefs and loyalties; recreations widely enjoyed--is not, by its wide spread, contemptible. The common culture is composed, then, of the matters enclosed in the sentence above. Some elements of our common culture "taught" in the schools are punctuality, sports, "winning", containment of the more obvious rebellions against the authority of adulthood and officials, the value of material acquisition, social and economic mobility, a sense of "place" or "station" (especially for one or another minority, depending on region), intelligible

American speech, the near-omnipotence of technology, a (cautious) religiosity.

Recent or current effective subcultures are numerous. Some, despite television and airlines, are still regional: Texas, Appalachia, South Boston, the Deep South, certain southwest suburbs of Chicago. Others: middle-middle Protestantism, both isolationist and assimilationist urban Blacks, the Amish, males, "youth". Obviously, subcultures tend to affect only some schools or school systems, not American schooling as a whole. Their effects can be spectacular as well as potent, however, as witness the recent Kanawha County instance and South Boston. Effects include strictures on sex education, demands for corporal punishment, control of dress and hair styles, the inclusion of anthropology in the school program, what stories are available in the library, what is taught as American history or as biology.

The channels of input for common-cultural inputs are pervasive, though less patently structured than those for influences of the Civitas. They range from the whispered advice of influential citizen to school-board member to riots. They include the personality types, the social-class origins and the interpersonal styles of teachers selected for the schools, as well as the votes for taxes and bond issues. Pathetically, but not unexpectedly, the child who goes from home to school is a much-used channel. He or she is given more than adequate signals by parents about what must be learned well, what can be safely (even profitably) ignored in the school curriculum.

and how different behaviours of different teachers are to be received. Nor should the peer group, per se, be ignored, as it comes under the influence of locally acclaimed models and heroes.

#### CLIENT-PERCEIVED WANTS AND NEEDS

These wants and needs are distinguishable from common subcultural influences in most cases. Common cultural wants are durable. Client-perceived wants are ephemeral and correlated with fluctuations in the polity, the economy or climate (social as well as meteorological). They have included fluctuations in demand for vocational training and shifts in what vocations are aimed for. They concern uses of school buildings and facilities. They stem from and reflect mobility aspirations, hence are directed to such diverse targets as college entrance and "proper" speech patterns and idioms.

The channel of input is often by direct request from parents to school teachers and administrators. The PTA may also serve. Ad hoc coalitions in the community and campaigns for or against school officers may also function.

On the national scale, grass-roots perceptions of campaigning candidates and overt communications to them constitute channels. Often, these channels merge with those of the Civitas, since so many client-centered demands can be anticipated in the light of social-economic changes.

#### KNOWLEDGE RESOURCES

Certain fruitful fields of inquiry and some competences are popularly taken as constituting the human heritage to which

all humans should be heirs in one degree or another. The three Rs are the most venerable cases in point. History, geography, some mathematics beyond long division, and, under one or another name, rudiments of political science, pretty well complete the modern roster.

These bodies of knowledge and competence reach and affect the schools by an osmosis through the entire membrane which interfaces school and society. They are taken for granted as natural joints of nature, and as the inescapable "subjects" of schooling. They are, in fact, parts of common culture but worth distinguishing for the sake of thought about school curriculum, especially thought about the competences and fields of enquiry which are not usually included or are barely represented (physical and biological sciences, anthropology, psychology, music, the plastic and literary arts, for example).

The commonly recognized fields bear one unfortunate consequence of common recognition: they are taken to be ineluctable truths, capable neither of enlargement or radical alteration. The "updating" emphasis of the large science-curriculum revisions of the early '60s was one attempt to modify this stance. Recent re-emphasis on "rhetoric" is at least a pendulum swing in the teaching of language usage. On the whole, however, the traditional "basics" of schooling go on and on, with only minor wavelets of changing emphasis (e.g., "ecology")

#### COMMUNITIES OF INQUIRY

Communities of inquiry whose products are NOT commonly recognized as constituting the human heritage press for time

(or more time) in the school curriculum. Anthropology, a much-enlarged geography, meteorology, economics, philosophy, American literary criticism, burgeoning lists of second languages, psychology and sociology are among current contenders--some with financing, some without.

Invariably, one or another representative of each such field uses the idiot argument, "Since we all are made of atoms and molecules (or living cells, or social impulses, or economic needs) we need to know about these things." There are other and sometimes better arguments for one or another among these contenders for school time, and there are obvious self-interests. The communities of inquiry want student-candidates. To get and keep them, they must "place" them. Placing requires places.

There are two conspicuous channels of input for this force. One consists of the organized community of inquiry per se, operating through governmental agencies by promising to strengthen the economy, the defence, loyalty, responsiveness to political needs or appeals, or by promising to play a current and respectable equivalent of Roman circuses. The other is by way of alliance between the organized representation of the inquiring community and a potentially sympathetic organization of teachers. The "alliance" is often a relation of captor and captive, the inquiring body using existing pecking orders, patronage and snob appeals to enlist the aid of teachers, or promising refreshing novelty and avant-gardeity to school administrators.

#### "PROFESSIONAL" INTERESTS

It goes without saying that professional interests of

teachers, administrators, counselors, curriculum specialists and "evaluators" affect the curriculums of the schools. Some attempts at effect are entirely in the self-interest of the group at work. Evaluators fight for a piece of the action by demanding behavioral objectives easily capable of reliable achievement measurement by conventional devices, regardless of the effect of such restrictions on the kind and quality of teaching-learning. Administrators keep a weather eye on approvals and disapprovals of upper administrators, community members, and voters, independent of judgements concerning better and worse school preparation of the young, and behave similarly with respect to obtaining and using available, tagged funds. Teachers, through their growing unions and lengthening contracts demand autonomy in the classroom, erasure of judgements concerning better and worse teaching, and instant tenure. Needless to say, special educationists, early childhood teachers, and enrichment specialists press for a more assured place in the budget and curriculum, while, at the secondary level, teachers of different subject areas vie with one another for the time and interest of students.

Meanwhile, some members of each of these groups care very much about the welfare of students and the Civitas, give thought to what and how much of what will most benefit both, and do what they can to resist or mediate the numerous self-interested forces that press the schools.

Since the force of professional interests act within the schools, the question of input channel becomes here a question

of human organization within the walls and other limits of an institution. Ethnographers, students of group behavior, sociologists, have begun study of the factors which operate here. Their fruits are, as yet, unripe.

#### SOME COMMENTS

One empirical question should be addressed to each of the "forces" above described: What effect on the schools' content, aims and effectiveness does each have?

One speculative question should be addressed to each: How other than by competition with the other five, can the effect of each be mediated and controlled?

Two empirical questions should (and are beginning to be) asked of the schools as a whole in the light of the operative forces:

1. What are the schools doing (or trying to do)?
2. What are the consequences of schooling? That is, what characteristics, cultural, social, political, psychological, as well as cognitive, mark the children of our culture; which and how much of each of these can be attributed to schooling?

Finally, there is the crucial question, now almost wholly ignored: What ought the schools be doing? This question entails, if sanely put, the premise that what they ought to do they could be set to doing, at least in part. Some epigones of some able practitioners of systems theory deny that anything whatever can be done by rational consideration and purposed intervention.

They do not convince me.

A POSTSCRIPT

Conspicuously missing from the above roster of forces is the wish that the potentials of each child be identified and realized. This wish is voiced by thousands of teachers and is probably a true voicing by more than half of them. There is evidence that some effort is made to discover and realize the individual potentials of children which bear on the playing of social roles. There is little evidence that much is done with respect to other potentials. Is this because of the state of our culture? Are, then, the systems-theoretical epigones right and we are all the victims of the machine?